

JULY 8, 1993

The country from about 15 miles west of San Angelo, at least as far as the Big Bend has had the mildest winter in the history of weather records. The last killing frost was two months ago. Though spring isn't in sight, afternoons currently range in the 90's and the nights run in the mid-60's.

At the ranch, we feed three days a week. It's hard to think of other work on the warm Indian summer like days with the mesquite trees in full leaf and cactus leaves turning a lush green. The birds staying away to the south and north of us makes the scene dreary. Quite a few scissortails flew in after the April cold spell, but they didn't seem to have the heart to stay around such a bleak environment. Red harvester ants, also, waited until June to hatch. Their dens still lack the vigor of summer time.

Over a third of our calves have been sold. Some of the fleshier steers weighed right on up close to 400 pounds in town, a long shot from the six and seven weight cattle the rain belt ranchers consign to the special sales. But we fancier vendors of green calves and pot-bellied yearlings are going to have better records and more time to think what to do next year, than those greedy materialistic money bag operators, who have the nerve to accuse us of being jealous of a little ole boom that'd be a pin prick up next to the size of our feed bills.

Out of the dozens of ideas to whip dry spells, the best one to be invented has had the least publicity. The way it works is every time a load of feed comes to the ranch, a load of cattle go to market. In the days of livestock trucks hauling out feed and back loading cattle to Fort Worth, the plan was foolproof, or close to so. All sales were applied to demand papers and all expenses had to be okayed during banking hours, anyway. Bankers didn't feel so bad as long as the feed bill fell at the same rate their collateral disappeared.

Naturally, the timing had to be right to come out with a handful of yearlings, or a nubbing of smooth mouthed cows. Not so many head, you understand, they'd eat up what feed was left in the barn before the grass came back good and strong.

Lots of years have passed since we had such a long winter in the Shortgrass Country. However, dry ones always are mild and warm. One thing for sure, we'd better be thankful green calves don't take on a sour taste like unripened vegetables...